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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 001323

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SUBJECT: FAPC AND FNI MILITIAS FIGHTING IN ITURI

REF: KAMPALA IIR 6 913 0577 04

Classified By: Poloff Gons Nachman for Reasons 1.5 B and D

1. (C) Summary. Fighting between FAPC and FNI militias in Ituri has continued into a second week resulting in hundreds of IDPs and an undetermined number of refugees. The conflict has been fueled by apparent efforts to control a gold mine and the perception that MONUC's and the GDRC's attention and resources have shifted to the Kivus. End Summary.

FAPC Takes Advantage of MONUC's Decreased Strength in Ituri

2. (C) Militias from the Popular Armed Forces of the Congo (FAPC) and the Nationalist and Integrationist Front (FNI) have continued their fighting in the Mahagi area of Ituri for a second week. UNHCR's representative for the DRC, David Kapya, returned from an assessment mission to Mahagi on July 12. Poloff spoke with him the same day about the security situation. Kapya said that fighting between FAPC, led by commander Jerome Kakawave, and the FNI, nominally led by Floribert Njabu, continued on Sunday even as Kapya met with MONUC Nepalese peacekeepers in Mahagi. It is estimated that over 50 militias and 4 civilians have died as a result of the fighting.

3. (C) According to a MONUC Nepalese Colonel in Mahagi, Jerome provoked FNI into fighting after sending some of his men to harass Lendu women in a market. After FNI responded, FAPC took the opportunity to challenge FNI's control of the gold mine near Jalasiga. FAPC also appears interested in taking control of Mahagi port on Lake Albert. Although the local population wants MONUC to use its Chapter VII authority to stop the fighting, the Nepalese peacekeepers have so far stayed out of the conflict.

4. (C) Kapya explained that MONUC has less than 600 peacekeepers in Mahagi and approximately 2,000 in all of Ituri (Note: According to MONUC's General Rashad, this decreased presence is due to a company of peacekeepers having been sent to Bukavu, one to Kinshasa, and one that has yet to arrive from Kisangani. End Note.) Moreover, due to the current focus on the Kivus, MONUC only has one attack helicopter in Bunia. Jerome, by contrast, is estimated to have over 3,000 well-armed fighters. It is also alleged that some of Jerome's commanding officers are Rwandans, including a Colonel Ndayisaba. Additionally, MONUC reported that prior to, and during the conflict, FNI and FAPC leaders have been seen frequently in Arua and Kampala allegedly seeking support from Ugandan generals. (Comment: Ugandan MOD made clear recently (reftel) it does not intend to intervene, but expects MONUC to do more to quell the fighting. End Comment.)

5. (C) The ongoing conflict between FAPC and FNI militias has also called into question DDR plans for Ituri. FNI militias have now said that they will not disarm unless all other groups do the same simultaneously. UNDP teams and NGOs preparing implementation of the Ituri plan have also been disrupted by the insecurity and have been unable to travel to the proposed demobilization sites.

Fighting Results in IDPs and Refugees

6. (C) Kapya said that hundreds of people had been internally displaced as a result of the fighting, with the majority of IDPs moving towards Mahagi and Kpwandroma. Six hundred IDPs had been reported to gather at a Catholic Church to ask for assistance only to be told that there was none. Very little humanitarian assistance is currently available in Mahagi and insecurity has prevented Bunia-based NGOs from delivering aid.

7. (C) Kapya indicated that UNHCR Kampala was investigating allegations of Congolese refugees crossing into Uganda. However, at this point there are only unconfirmed reports that 2,000 civilians may have crossed from Mahagi. He noted that due to ongoing instability in Ituri, UNHCR would not be able to repatriate in the near future the 12,000 Congolese refugees that remain in Uganda, most of whom come from the area of Boga, currently controlled by FNI militia.

Comment

18. (C) Jerome appears to be taking advantage of MONUC's focus on the Kivus and its diminished strength in Ituri to pursue economic interests in Mahagi. Fighting is likely to continue, along with the displacement of civilians for as long as MONUC and the GDRC are seen as maintaining a hands-off attitude towards the conflict.
SCOTT